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# The Kim Joon Kim Joon Kim Joon Kim Joon Intrusion

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Art is an obsession, and *Ren Wan* loses grip of herself amidst Kim Joon's beguiling imagery.

Photos | Sundaram Tagore Gallery  
Special thanks to Inhee Iris Moon for interpretation



Art to humanity, like hope to life, is the purpose of being, the main cog of an apparatus; convincing eyes and souls that dreams exist to be shaped, desires to be fulfilled, taboos to be wrecked. In between political and commercial propaganda, some artists find their place amidst a realm of the non sequitur.

Kim Joon is an artist of this kind. What's more: he is the kind of maverick who puts one's head in the clouds, only to provide a morve pellucid view of the earthy ground. His engrossing images communicate a sensation too complex to put into words. The spurious compositions gesture hidden cravings for something non-sensical.

"What I try to do is to make artwork that defies conventional art," the artist explained, "Therefore when you see my artwork, you will see it's cool but you are not sure how good it is, and it's very hard to define."

Kim Joon was born in Seoul in 1966. The bachelor and masters years at Hongik University taught him to be a painter; yet his days part-timing in an animation company taught him to replace his paintbrush with a computer. The nude bodies on his prints are all fictitious outcomes of computer fabrications that make his work even more jaw-dropping. According to the artist, his iconic digital prints are derived from videos. "Images are like thousands of cuts of the video," he explained. "It is like a moment of a video. They are inseparable."

The shift from "Joon the painter" to "Joon the digital artist" was a rational decision and, as the artist put it, "an organic transformation".

"It was something I had to do, I have to make a living as an artist. 10 years ago I didn't make much money." Albeit the change, when an audience points at his tattooed digital prints in this day and age, the thoughtful artist will say "call them paintings". With this boundless medium, Kim explores a multitude of icons that define contemporary zeitgeist, those emotions that make us humane.

Gently Kim Joon dipped a needle in a light spread of Chinese ink, and pinched the hueed point into the skin of his fellow military servicemen. What came with the slight tinge of pain were impromptu tattoos. These were the icons that differentiated the uniformed multitude, personifying their desires, and the very unique elements those men were made of.

Marcel Duchamp proclaimed that art could be about ideas instead of worldly things; Kim Joon uses worldly objects to depict the ideas underneath. Amongst his early works, a human heart-shaped "thing" is wrapped by tattooed human skin (Holly Love, 2004), a spread of punched skin covered by notations (Konglish, 1997), showed how his obsession with tattoo took shape.

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"My early tattoo paintings were three dimensional canvases in the form of lumps of flesh or parts of a body..." the artist said, "I was interested in tattoo as a metaphor for hidden desire or a kind of compulsion engraved into human consciousness. I see the skin, or in some case the monitor, as an extension of a canvas."

He, however, defies the general address saying that he is a tattoo or body artist. "What interests me is the story underneath, which is not visible," he elaborated. "It is not a kind of body art, because technically there is no body used in the image. It is all computer-generated." Instead of pursuing his aesthetics on real skin, Kim Joon stretches his animation knowledge to make the computer screen his new artistic playground, where he creates lifelike nude bodies blanketed by multi-coloured tattoos that may suffice a tattoo fanatic. The process of tattooing, he refers to, is a kind of provoking desire.

The prints that clothe the bodies include traditional Asian patterns and totems, and such a well-known picture as the banana print in an Andy Warhol's masterpiece (Stay - Warhol, 2007). As the creative pursuit thrives, brand logos and consumer objects fill his 'canvas'. In the celebrated "Bird Land" series in 2008 and 2009, Kim showcased an array of boldly coloured and jam-packed bodies seized by prints and logos, from motor giants like Chrysler and Honda, to luxury brands like Balenciaga and Armani, as if he plotted to visualise the hunger of consumers nowadays.

"It is not about whether I like the brands. These are the names so prevailing in our society that we cannot really avoid. It is part of capitalist society. The real question is, can I avoid these things? And I do not think I can," Kim elaborated. "That's why I use them as the subject of the tattoos. It shows the pressure, the reality. They appear as a kind of intrusion."

As an artist, Kim Joon brings about a surge of emotions. Like James Cameron's "Avatar", the seamless collision of reality and dream presents a bare panorama of human emotions. The coming pages are a vivid manifestation of how the Kim Joon's photographic poetry comes into reality, and presents a simply exceptional imagery.

Over the next few pages, Kim Joon collaborates with our fashion contributors in a fashion spread detailing brands with models almost in the nude. Kim's stunning artworks provide a provocative backdrop and social comment on the world of branding — in an exclusive collaboration with WestEast.